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China-Mongolia Boundary Atlas

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*Information available as of 15 May 1981
has been used in the preparation of this report.*

This paper was prepared by [redacted] East
Asia Branch, Office of Geographic and Societal
Research. Comments and queries are welcome and
may be addressed to the Chief, East Asia Branch,
OGSR. [redacted]

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Background

The China-Mongolia boundary has long been a potential source of friction. Mongolia, under nominal Chinese sovereignty since the late 17th century, declared its independence in 1911, and Russia (after 1917, the USSR) accelerated its efforts to dominate the new country. The Republic of China disregarded Mongolia's unilateral declaration for over 30 years; not until 1945, in an exchange of notes with the Soviet Union, did China agree to recognize the Mongolian People's Republic—if a plebiscite confirmed that independence had the support of the Mongolian people.

Even after the vote for independence, the boundary remained undefined. The only portion that had been settled through negotiation was in the east where Mongolian and Soviet forces had fought against Japanese troops in 1939 over its alignment. An agreement between the Japanese and Mongolians was reached in 1942, and some demarcation was completed in this area. After World War II, the Chinese Government refused to recognize any boundary agreement involving the Japanese and avoided further negotiations pending the outcome of the struggle for control of the mainland. During this period, Chinese and Mongolian troops were involved in minor clashes in the west as a result of their different versions of the border.

Even after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the boundary alignment shown on Chinese maps differed markedly from that on Soviet maps, substantially the one accepted by Mongolia. By the mid-1950s, however, Chinese maps were depicting less extensive claims along all of the borders disputed by Beijing. Nevertheless, sizable territorial differences were apparent between Chinese and Mongolian versions, particularly in the Altai Mountains in the west and along portions of the Nei Monggol-Mongolian border.

By the early 1960s China was attempting to improve relations with Mongolia and agreed to negotiate a

boundary treaty. It was signed on 25 December 1962, and the demarcation of the entire boundary was completed in 1964. This boundary favors the traditional Mongolian version. The Chinese apparently were generous and—recognizing that most of the settlements and development in the border area were Mongolian—agreed to formalize local understanding of where the boundary was, particularly in populated sectors.

During the early 1960s China had peacefully negotiated several other disputes that resulted in the demarcation of its boundaries with Burma, Nepal, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Particularly bitter boundary disputes with India and the Soviet Union remained unresolved, however, and the Chinese perhaps hoped that treating Mongolia equitably would provide the world additional proof that they negotiated responsibly and quickly on boundary matters.

The Border Protocol was signed on 30 June 1964 following the completion of demarcation by the Boundary Commission. It is a detailed account of the precise location of the boundary and its markers.

Neither side released details of the boundary settlement, and cartographic depiction of the boundary remained inconsistent. Some changes in the boundary alignment on small-scale maps later published by China and the Soviet Union presumably reflected the treaty provisions. In 1971 a copy of the protocol was translated into English and published by the Joint Publications Research Service (JPRS 52218, 21 January 1971, 179 pages). Most of the boundary points and terrain features described in the protocol could not be identified on cartographic materials available to US

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cartographers. Hence the boundary alignment shown on medium-scale (1:250,000) US maps had to be derived from small-scale Chinese or Soviet maps, which resulted in considerable guesswork as to the precise alignment of much of the border. [redacted]

Early this year, in the first map exchange between officials of the United States and China, a copy of the 1964 *Boundary Atlas* was provided to the US Government. [redacted]

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